

A Place In the Canyons



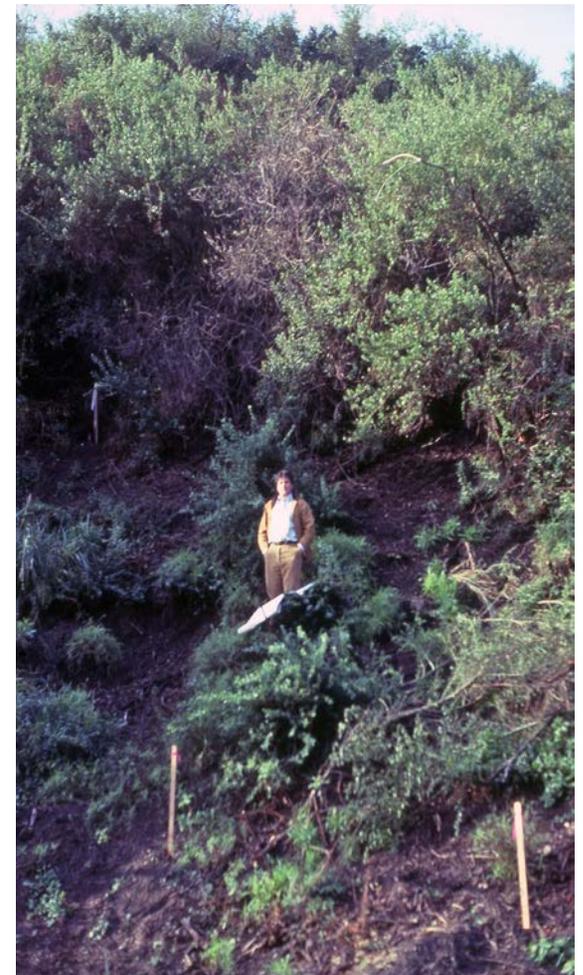
Foreword

My first job after architectural school was in London working on early designs for the new British Library. As one of only two Americans in a largely Cambridge-educated office of forty, I was also in a distinct minority of persons who had never set foot in California. Maybe it was the surfboard emblazoned with the Union Jack that hung on the Wall of the office library that did it – a gift to my boss, Sandy Wilson, from an architect in California. But in 1973, sensing for the first time a slight twinge of nationalism, I left London for Los Angeles, to look around. Yale had introduced me to landscape studies – “reading” the built environment as cultural expression – and also to “popular” culture (as opposed to the other kind). So I passed over the Northeastern landscape that I knew best and to which I expected to shortly return, for a first visit to a newer, less influenced one that I mistakenly assumed to be essentially different.

Still “out” here forty years later, I think myself fortunate to have taken that chance to learn more about this country from its Southwest, and especially from Los Angeles, the exasperating and revealingly American city that my family and I call home. 10256 – the street number of Arroyo House, our home, has more to do with Thomas Jefferson’s Francophilic geographical abstractions than with the last of five houses on a narrow, dead end lane. I like to imagine Jefferson’s reaction to my L.A. with its ever-expanding street grid as armature for the temporary use of space (perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of the American landscape as historian J.B. Jackson believed), the continuing supremacy of the single-family house and the private car, gardens supported by water brought six times as far as the Romans ever tried, infrastructure problems too big to imagine, grave educational and environmental woes, distance as enforcer of segregation, and the strange feeling architectural historian Vincent Scully has described as “the simultaneous sense of liberation and loss one feels in a city devoid of monumental form.” Odd as it may seem, I’ll guess that the overall feeling might remind Jefferson more of the unsightly, *ad hoc* vitality of colonial East Coast settlements (before the myth and white paint) than of the urban formalisms he (and I) would admire.

I was joined here by Karen Simonson, a lawyer refugee from the Washington-Cambridge axis. Marrying her, as my Yankee father never tired of noting, is the smartest thing I have ever done. Together, we built an unusual little house that bridges across an “unbuildable” arroyo site that has grown to two hilly acres of gardens, meadows and working vineyard. Beverly Glen, the canyon in which it’s located, is nestled between the affluent precincts of Beverly Hills and Bel Air. Karen fondly refers to it as the “Appalachia of West Los Angeles” and to its stillness she gratefully returns after her daily hundred-mile commute. Our daughter Charlotte is a native Californian (born down the hospital hallway from an ailing Elizabeth Taylor) who, by the age of four was, already growing bored by deer in the chaparral around her sandbox but knew to make way for visiting coyotes. An alumna of the bi-lingual UCLA Lab School, built along a creek that once watered the Rancho San Jose de Buenos Ayres, she speaks more Spanish than I. After college in Massachusetts she’s now set on continuing a family tradition as a law student in New York City where she enjoys living with a relish that I think must be reserved for young Angelenos.

Seeking anchorage in time and place, the architecture our firm produces grows, in an abstract way, from its specific physical and social contexts – buildings as abstract interpreters of sites and institutions. We’ve been fortunate to see a range of projects constructed: libraries, university buildings, concert halls, industrial plants, workplaces, exhibitions, furniture, houses, and gardens. For many years I’ve enjoyed linking practice with teaching architectural design and landscape studies, first at Rice University and then at UCLA. Along the way I’ve undertaken independent research and been a part of organized efforts to better understand the dynamics of landscape transformations in this country. The interaction of the planned and the unplanned, the political and the vernacular is fundamental to understanding why America looks the way it does and find the latter to be a compelling subject of cultural inquiry.



This book documents one such transformation that I have been fortunate to observe close-up and continuously for thirty years. It's that of a small patch of unbuilt terrain that exists in an urban context that is rare in American cities. I like to think it can be seen as a contemporary version of some ancient, trans-cultural story of a stranger pioneering virgin land, encountering difficulty, being informed by the engagement and changed by the experience, and slowly, over time, realizing that it has resulted in something more complexly layered and beautiful than anything he or she could ever have initially imagined.

Architecture critic, Robert Campbell, colorfully likens the designer's role in this tortuous process to that of Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Thrust into a strange landscape at once beautiful and menacing he must adapt to changing goals and opportunities over time in order to exert control. Gardeners are more likely to view the repetitive sequence of observation, intervention, reassessment, and adjustment as a practical norm. No matter how one describes it, because both the perceiver and that which is perceived are simultaneously changing, it's a fluid experience – one that leaves ample room for unintended results and clouds the memory of how things once were. I'm hopeful that the photographs in this book convey a sense of how the passage of time and the mutability of memory combine to make for surprising comparisons of current conditions and those as found. My attempt to understand how the site came to exist as such as well as the direction its metamorphosis has taken, has been ordered and expanded by the work of investigators in an array of disciplines: geography, history, ecology, climatology as well as architecture, urbanism, horticulture and garden design. Like all landscape studies, this story involves topics the relatedness of which may not be immediately clear. In order to establish the genesis of the site as we found it, the text touches on subjects such as *Alta California*, chaparral, rainfall, railroads, and most importantly, building a garden from scratch.

When first inserted in virgin terrain, Arroyo House covered almost the entire extent of the land we owned. In initiating the garden on what little was left, I was fortunate to be introduced by a client to the late Robert M. Fletcher, an inspired, young landscape architect who grew up within a few miles of our house. Fletcher became my teacher, conducting simultaneous introductory surveys of the native plants, horticulture, and garden design history of Southern California. Working with Fletcher and nurseryman Clark Cowen, we found room to plant a number of native trees from thirty-inch boxes. The first planting included one Live Oak and a few California Sycamores that are now mature specimens. Displaying an uncanny prescience, Cowan also gave us and planted – well off our property at that time – five, five gallon Coast Redwoods for which we hadn't even asked. "I thought you could use these," was all he said. As it



turns out, the location he selected was ideal for the species and today a shady copse of superbly healthy redwoods nearly seventy feet tall towers over the watercourse forming a key compositional element that separates the lawn from the house and fully shades its mown fescue on hot summer afternoons. Other trees in the first planting included Aleppo Pines, Podocarpus, and a California Pepper.

A proponent of an approach long-practiced by California garden designers, Fletcher preferred to merge new planting with existing native species. Cultivated shrubs were often selected for their likeness or biological relation to plants endemic to the chaparral regime. At Arroyo House, these include the Strawberry Tree, Silverberry, and Coyote Bush. Other plants, selected for their drought tolerance included Pride of Madera, Jerusalem Sage and Bear's Breeches to name a few. Colors were subtle and greens dominated but there were always a few "seasonal surprises".

Unbuilt hillsides in Los Angeles often remain that way because geotechnical consultants have found them to be unstable and prone to landslides. Even those that are considered grossly stable tend to accumulate loose rock, gravel, soil, and detritus. In order to protect hillside houses from damage, the building code requires level rear yards with protective retaining walls and drainage swales on their uphill sides to collect sliding rock, mud, and debris. When Arroyo House was built in 1985, its rear yard, entered off the third floor library, was surrounded by required retaining walls above which were planted trees, shrubs, and ground cover. The outdoor fireplace at its center brought to mind the famous surreal photograph of the ambiguously indoor / outdoor roof terrace of the Besteiguy Apartment designed in 1930 by Le Corbusier and, in homage to the great Swiss-born French architect, it was planted with grass. A small hand mower was stationed close at hand to allow visitors who appreciated this rather obscure reference to participate in maintaining the tiny lawn. Architectural historians and journalists, usually hardened urbanites, seemed especially to enjoy the odd sensation of mowing a swath or two. But Robert Fletcher's response to this grassy enclosure was more to the point. "The only problem with your garden," he declared, "is that you can't get into it." Shortly thereafter, the eastern wall was breached and a gated opening was installed. Later, the first of hundreds of tons of recycled broken concrete paving was introduced to support a decomposed granite path out into nature. We now know how right he was.

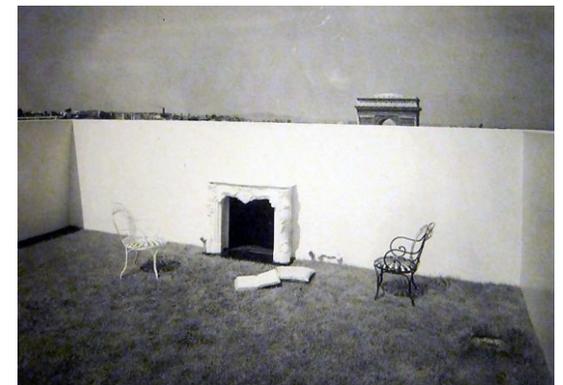
Over time we observed that small lots surrounding our property occasionally changed hands at an auction held annually by the L.A. County Tax Assessor's Office for the purpose of recovering unpaid property taxes. Without a full understanding of why they existed, we began accumulating, unbuildable-looking parcels bordering on our own. Over the past twenty years our original two lots have grown

to nineteen plus the area of a number of unbuildable city streets platted among them. As the last house on an "unimproved" lane that climbs from the main canyon roadway, Arroyo House was originally very much a *destination*. But, as the property expanded and we controlled the winter runoff, constructed revetments and terraces, and installed trees, plants and infrastructure, Arroyo House, just as we ourselves, began to open outwardly to the transformation occurring around it. So the identity of the house gradually changed and we began to think of it less as an end point and more as a *portal* to something larger and that is a function it now performs.

Discussion of the garden that is central to this story traces a series of successive moments in that metamorphosis. I like to think of the result as combining the good-natured utility of a Renaissance pleasure garden with the robust simplicity of an English wild garden and am hopeful that at least some nuance of these similarities is apparent in the photographs. The reader will quickly observe that this is neither a finely detailed garden nor is it vast. But anyone who has attempted to pioneer a farm, vineyard, or garden on a hillside at the edge of a forest or woodlot will be familiar with the vicissitudes and laborious demands of this unending endeavor and the garden at Arroyo House is far from finished. Looking back on the experience thus far, I am reminded of Winston Churchill's wartime formulation of a particular high point in an ongoing process – one that all builders of gardens are sure to recognize as well:

"Now this is not the end.
It is not even the beginning of the end.
But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

BP
June, 2013

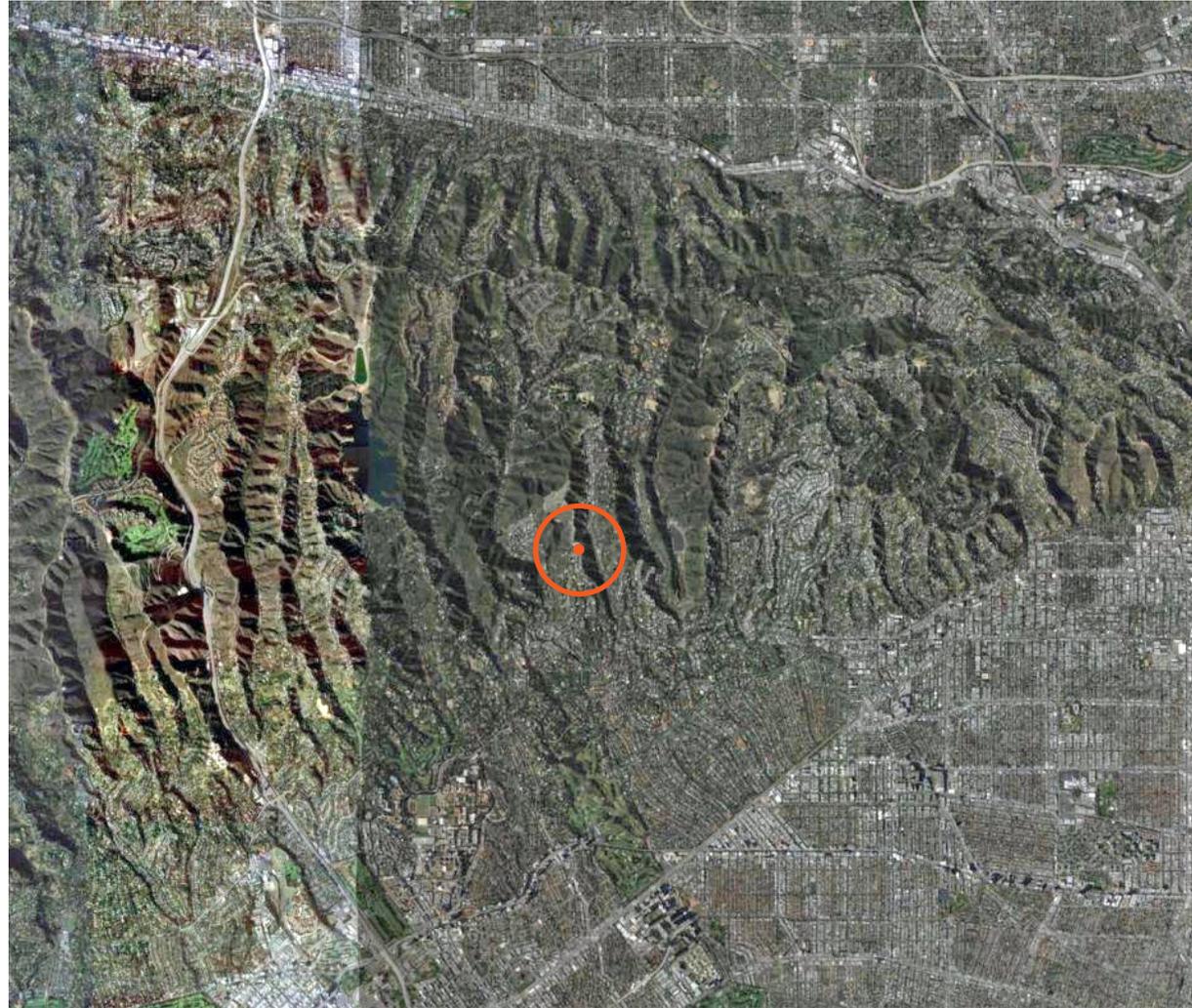


L.A. Anchorage

When one hears Angelenos speak of “the canyons”, it’s a safe bet they are referring to the series of nearly parallel passes that cut through the coastal Santa Monica Mountains at the tail end of their eastward sweep across the map of Los Angeles. As dwelling places in this vast suburban landscape, these narrow, steeply sloped topographic formations combine the appeal of quiet lanes and enclave distinction with long, layered views, dramatic effects of sunlight, endemic plants and wildlife, heightened seasonal change, and dark, starry, night skies.

Youthful by geologists’ reckoning, canyon ridges are actively rising and crumbling at the same time. Composed mostly of partially metamorphosed sedimentary rock – formerly the muddy ocean floor, broken and stirred by tectonic movement – the canyons were carved by erosion. Nowadays their unstable slopes, deep alluvial fill, winter flooding and extreme fire danger rule out conventional house construction. Compliance with sophisticated code requirements for slope stability, foundation design, and fire suppression can be expensive or simply impossible to obtain and city planning and building officials seem to like it that way. City costs for servicing such low density neighborhoods as well as liability for fire protection, utility service, trash collection, and building permission combine with substandard streets and intense NIMBY resistance from ensconced denizens to make development at almost any scale difficult to accomplish.

For locals, canyon names – Topanga, Rustic, Sullivan, Mandeville, Roscomare, Stone, Beverly Glen, Benedict, Coldwater, Franklin, Laurel, etc. – denote neighborhood character and define local populations with precision. Once the sites of campgrounds and quiet weekend retreats, the through canyons now function as traffic-packed commuter routes that link the warm San Fernando Valley with cooler West L.A. But, seemingly unfazed by one-way rush-hour hordes, even these places defy suburban convention. Residents seem to inhale local chauvinism with their chaparral-scented air and each canyon remains a world of its own. This is a story about strangers’ encounter with one of them.



Chaparral

Chaparral is the name given to the most extensive native plant regime in California and it's the state's most characteristic wilderness. Driving out of towns and cities in southern California and into the surrounding countryside, one is sooner or later immersed in chaparral. But in the overlaying canyons of western Los Angeles this dynamic seems to work in reverse. The chaparral actually keeps the city away. Here, especially in narrow, less well developed canyons like Beverly Glen, the one best known to me, immersion happens quickly.

While not particularly prepossessing as forests go, chaparral has been around for a long time, its ecological success goes unquestioned, and the observant find beauty in it. But, as locals are quick to note, there is also fear. Having evolved as a fire-dependent ecosystem, chaparral provides perfect conditions for ignition and fueling of fast-moving wildfires.

The word *chaparral* comes from the Spanish *chaparro* for a dwarf evergreen oak or a thicket of them. We are informed by the California Chaparral Institute that ecologists define it as a semi-arid, shrub-dominated association of woody plants shaped by summer drought, mild, wet winters, and occasional fires and are referred to as *sclerophyllous*. This term is derived from ancient Greek for "hard-leaved" and plants so-named exhibit traits that reduce evaporation. These include waxy coatings, unusually thick cell layers, and recessed *stomata* – the pores that allow evaporation and the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide. It's helpful in understanding the impenetrably dense, thorny shrubbery these plants produce to learn that chaps, the protective leggings worn by horseback riders, derive from the Spanish, *chapererras* from the same root.

Biologists believe that chaparral began forming in southern California approximately fourteen million years ago at a time when summer rains began to decrease. Beginning about ten million years ago the occurrence of fire appears to have increased dramatically, accelerating selection for adaptations that helped plant life survive. Plants requiring more moisture were pushed into canyons and higher



elevations. Then, two million years ago, coastal uplift occurred, creating some of the modern variation in elevation that we see today.

In California, coastal mountains block moist, ocean air from blowing further inland and seasonal change is defined more by the presence or absence of moisture than it is by variations in temperature. Hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters much like spring elsewhere in the U.S., characterize the pleasant "Mediterranean" climate that exists in Southern California and only six other regions on Earth. Due to the protective mountain barrier, there is just enough rain on the western side to support the chaparral and plant success is tightly regulated in the regime. For example, while mature endemic tree species, especially Ceanothus and Mountain Mahogany proliferate on the uncleared land surrounding canyon houses, Live Oaks have a much harder time of it. Their success is location-specific and seedlings are successful only on north-facing slopes. Even there, Oaks will most likely be found growing in lines tracing seasonal streams or *barrancas* that flow into the watercourse below. Building and planting in undisturbed canyon land requires encountering the chaparral and strategies for merging and contrasting are equally useful.



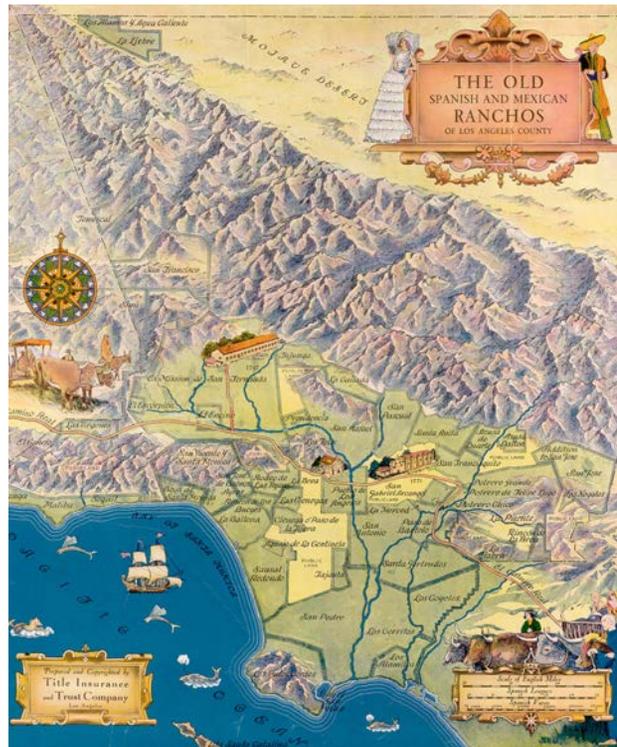
"The Glen"

If you know what you are looking at, uphill views from the dead-ends of Beverly Glen's narrow lanes can evoke a sense of the primeval. But everything built is fairly recent. Arroyo House, like most houses in the canyon, is the first building to break ground on its site. The oldest extant buildings in "The Glen" are frame houses from the early 20th century. And, unlike New England and other early-settled agricultural regions of the U.S., most of the surrounding woodlands have never been cleared except by fire. Settlement here presents a short, abstract record of the interactions of land use, railroads, and water. It's a story about the American way of assigning meaning to space and probably more properly a matter of geography than history.

In 1822, the Mexican Revolution relieved Spain of its claim to Alta California but the territory wasn't under Mexican control for very long. In 1846, a river exploration party of the U.S. Army happened upon and ended a 26-day revolt by American settlers aimed at establishing an independent California Republic and claimed California for the United States. Spain and Mexico had encouraged settlement in California by making grants of largely uninhabited land. Known as *ranchos*, their titles gave unencumbered property-ownership rights in perpetuity. Primarily agricultural in use, ranchos established land-use patterns that remain regionally recognizable. Their boundaries set an enduring basis for the state's land survey system and rancho names still appear on USGS maps and land titles.

The life of Francisco Sepúlveda, scion of a Spanish Mexican family that became prominent in Los Angeles, presents an instructive story. He was born in 1775 in Sinaloa, near the Gulf of California. As a small child he travelled twelve hundred miles north with his family – to settle a dusty little town with the long name, *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula*. In 1828, his service as soldier and administrator was recognized by the grant of ownership of the *Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica* – a mountainous, 33,000-acre property that included the northern two thirds of the canyon now known as Beverly Glen.

Springs in the canyon formed a stream that ran along the path of the current commuter roadway. The stream linked the much smaller Rancho San Jose de Buenos Aires – the location of the southern part of Beverly Glen – with Sepúlveda's huge holding on which it depended for water. Further south, much of its 4438 acres of dry savanna has been transformed into an Edenic part of Los Angeles that includes the well irrigated neighborhoods of Bel Air and Westwood and the now imposingly leafy UCLA campus.



Railroads, on which the growth of Southern California depended, lobbied for construction of deepwater ports to connect with the rest of the world. After the land of both ranchos had come under American ownership, the newly formed Los Angeles and Independence Railroad assembled a seventeen mile right-of-way passing across them to link downtown Los Angeles with wharves under construction in Santa Monica Bay. Much of the route was donated by ranchers anxious for rail access and the line was quickly constructed by a crew of Chinese workers imported expressly for the job.

But the LAIRR's attempt to continue construction east of Los Angeles drew strong opposition from railroad magnate, Collis P. Huntington of the Southern Pacific, whose refusal to allow crossing of their main line tracks led to severe fiscal difficulties for the young railroad. In 1887 it was acquired by the Southern Pacific which promptly began construction to extend an existing wharf 4,400 feet into Santa Monica Bay to allow access by larger ships. By 1888, more than ninety percent of all ocean-borne freight bound for Los Angeles arrived at this "Port of Los Angeles" located near the northern boundary of modern Santa Monica. There, it was loaded onto Huntington's newly renamed Santa Monica Railroad.

Locked in a rate war with the Santa Fe Railroad which favored the natural harbors of Wilmington and San Pedro, forty miles south of downtown and seeking to protect their Santa Monica operation, Huntington conceived of a way to bypass Los Angeles altogether if he had to. Secretly, he acquired a rail right-of-way through Brown Canyon (now Beverly Glen) that was to link Santa Monica with eastward-looking, inland rail yards. But an 1899 Federal government decision to construct the required breakwater off San Pedro and not Santa Monica effectively doomed Huntington's efforts to maintain the primacy of the Santa Monica site. In 1908 the Southern Pacific leased the Santa Monica Railroad line and wharf to Los Angeles Pacific, a forerunner of the Pacific Electric trolley system.

If Huntington's loss was actually the environmental salvation of both Santa Monica and Beverly Glen, it left the Southern Pacific with just two things to sell on the Westside of Los Angeles – its new magazine, *Sunset*, and its twenty-year old right-of-way through the canyon. Protected by surfacing news of the railroad's easement with its threat of collateral industrialization, the canyon had remained largely uninhabited during the early boom years of Los Angeles thus preserving its wildness and beauty.

The canyon was not opened for settlement until 1909 when B.C. Mayo, a real estate promoter working for the Southern Pacific and other land owners arrived to put "Beverly Glen" on the map. How the new name for the canyon originated



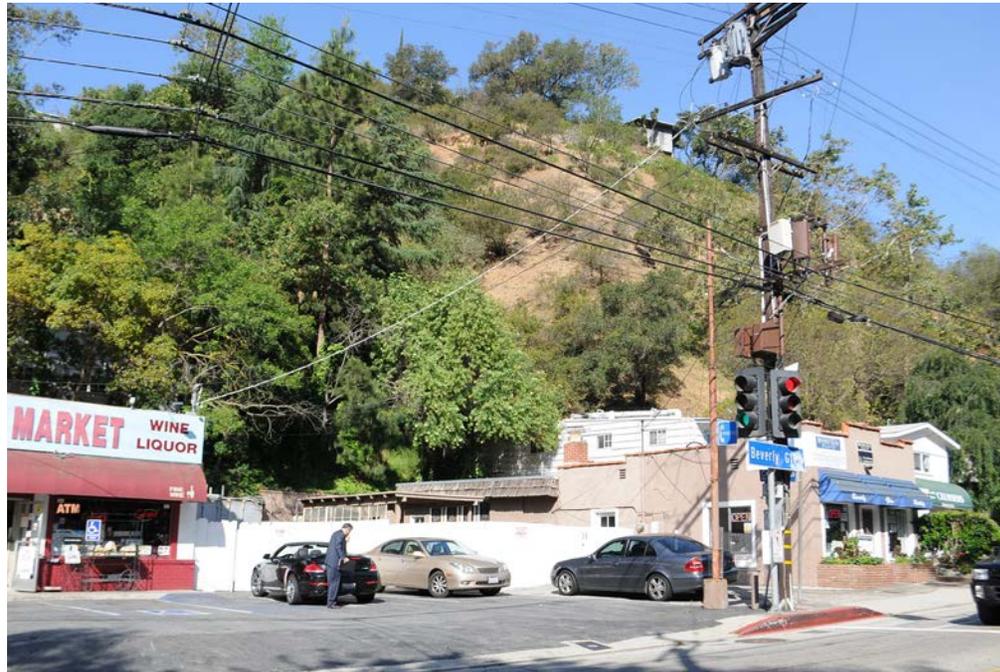


is unclear but one spring morning, a special train stopped at the corner of Wilshire and Santa Monica Boulevards in what is now Beverly Hills. Its cargo of building supplies, a survey team, and an exotic workforce of thirty "Hindus" was transferred to a horse-drawn carryall wagon and Mayo's *Beverly Glen Land Company* set slowly out. Traveling northwest for about two miles, they entered the canyon and after following the muddy streambed track uphill for another a mile and a quarter they stopped at a level widening. Felling Cottonwood trees that lined both sides of the stream, the workers made a clearing. The trees were later memorialized in the Glen's first named street – Cottonwood Lane – and, on the northeast corner of its intersection with the canyon road, the workforce encamped in the open until fall, when tents were distributed. Here the party remained for nearly seven years clearing chaparral, grading roads, and leveling house sites.

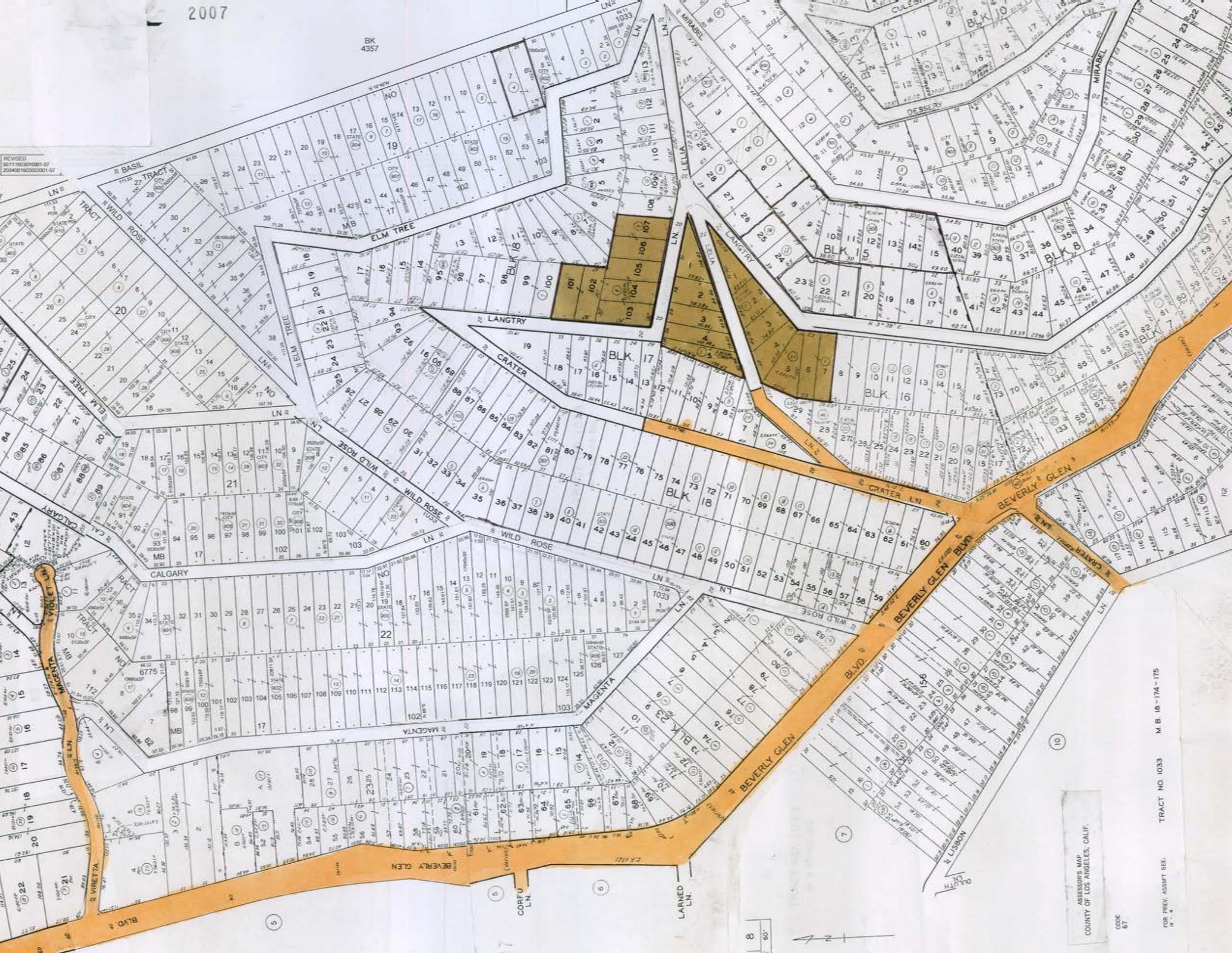
For three years, the winding canyon was surveyed and lanes were platted. Lots located on the main road and accessible lower reaches were sold as their surveys were completed. They were modestly sized – mostly 25 or 50 feet by 100 feet and many, irregularly shaped. But, regardless of shape, size or location, the price was the same for every lot: \$19.60. (or installments of \$4.60 a year). Further sweetening transactions, a subscription to *Sunset* was given away with each purchase.

But, reaching the upper slopes, surveyors observed that their steepness precluded practical access road construction. Apparently determined to divest the entire property, Mayo ordered the upper sides of the canyon to be laid out as if the topography were flat. The resulting inaccessible lots, served by illusory roads – now referred to as "paper streets" – were seen as essentially valueless except perhaps as promotional tools. For a while, one of these lots was given to every new subscriber to *Sunset*.

Cottonwood Lane has been renamed. Its intersection with the canyon road is now watched over by an impressive array of stoplights, cross walk signals, and signs reading: "NOT A THROUGH STREET", but it's still the everyday heart of the neighborhood. Unusual commercial zoning here marks the former nexus of the Beverly Glen Land Company's operations – Mayo's home, office, and store – and it remains the site of a tiny cluster of commercial buildings – much as it was over a hundred years ago. In L.A., that means something. Climbing former Cottonwood Lane to its end one comes upon Arroyo House.



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ASSESSOR'S MAP
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

CODE 67

FOR PREV. ASGMT SEE TRACT NO. 1033 M.B. 18-174-175

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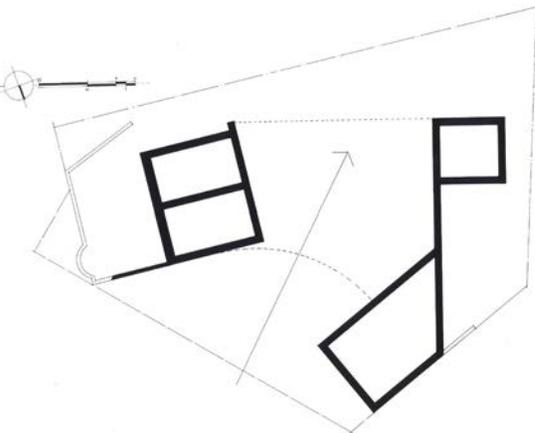


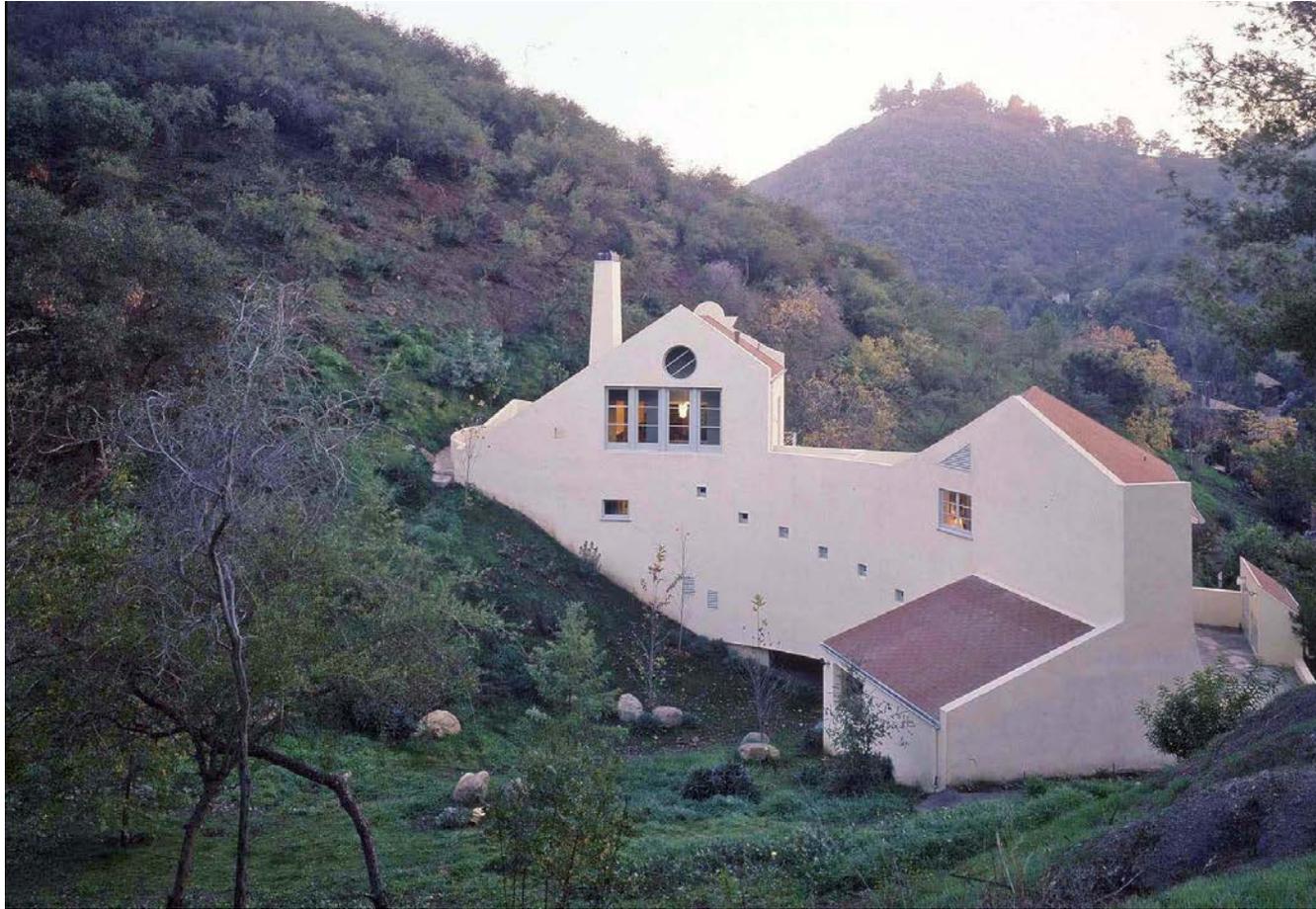
Inserting a House

In 1980, attracted by the lure of L.A.'s mountainous fringe, my wife and I, both East Coast refugees, purchased two small lots on which to build a house in Beverly Glen Canyon.

Framed by ridges and chaparral-covered slopes, underlain by seventy-five feet of loose alluvium, and annually reshaped by winter run-off from forty hillside acres, the site of our proposed house made engineers at the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety see red. Citing a new provision yet to appear in the published building code, its Grading Division peremptorily rejected the owners' meticulously prepared geo-technical report and officially stamped their property "UNBUILDABLE".

Left without better options and in no particular hurry, we chose to persist. After two years of bureaucratic skirmishing, during which we were able to demonstrate how a dwelling could safely bridge an enormous hypothetically projected mudflow (and still merge gracefully with nature), a building permit materialized and a talented young general contractor from Topanga Canyon inserted our house in the suspect terrain. In 1985, we moved in.





(Top)1985, (Bottom Left)1992, (Bottom Right)2012

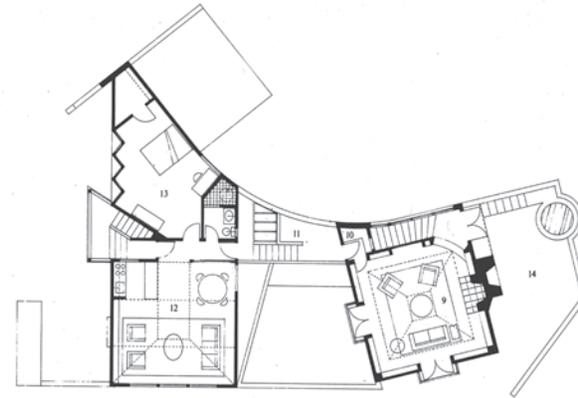
The Naturalizer

Spun from a traveler's dream of two free-standing pavilions split by a flowing stream like the Villa Lante, a playfully dual Renaissance residential composition for two princely brothers in the hills north of Rome, Arroyo House was eventually shaped more by hard functional and topographic facts that raised one casino higher than the other and joined them with a big curving wall that absorbs the phenomenal flow of the arroyo. Doing away with the all-American front yard, entry is directly from the drive-in foyer where an oversized stair begins a curving ascent.

Conceived partly as a transformational sequence for shedding city temperament, the stairway links discrete spaces each with a different relationship to outside and, at its end, arrives at a garden court with a gate that swings out into nature. Movement is cyclical and a hidden stair at the front of the house lands you back down by the front door. Thick walls, deep shadows, indoor / outdoor ambiguity, and natural cooling derive partly from climatically appropriate Andalusian revival houses of the 1920's, then already "green" by present day standards.



Villa Lante, Bagnaia
16th Century, Attributed to Vignola



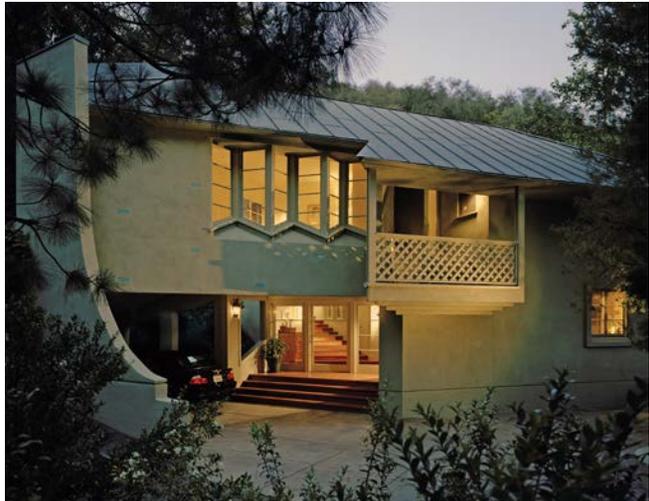
UPPER

- 9 LIVING ROOM
- 10 BAR
- 11 DECK
- 12 LIVING/DINING (OR STUDIO)
- 13 BEDROOM
- 14 TERRACE



LOWER

- 1 CARPORT
- 2 HALL
- 3 KITCHEN
- 4 DINING ROOM
- 5 COURT
- 6 CHADAR
- 7 MASTER BEDROOM
- 8 DRESSING ROOM

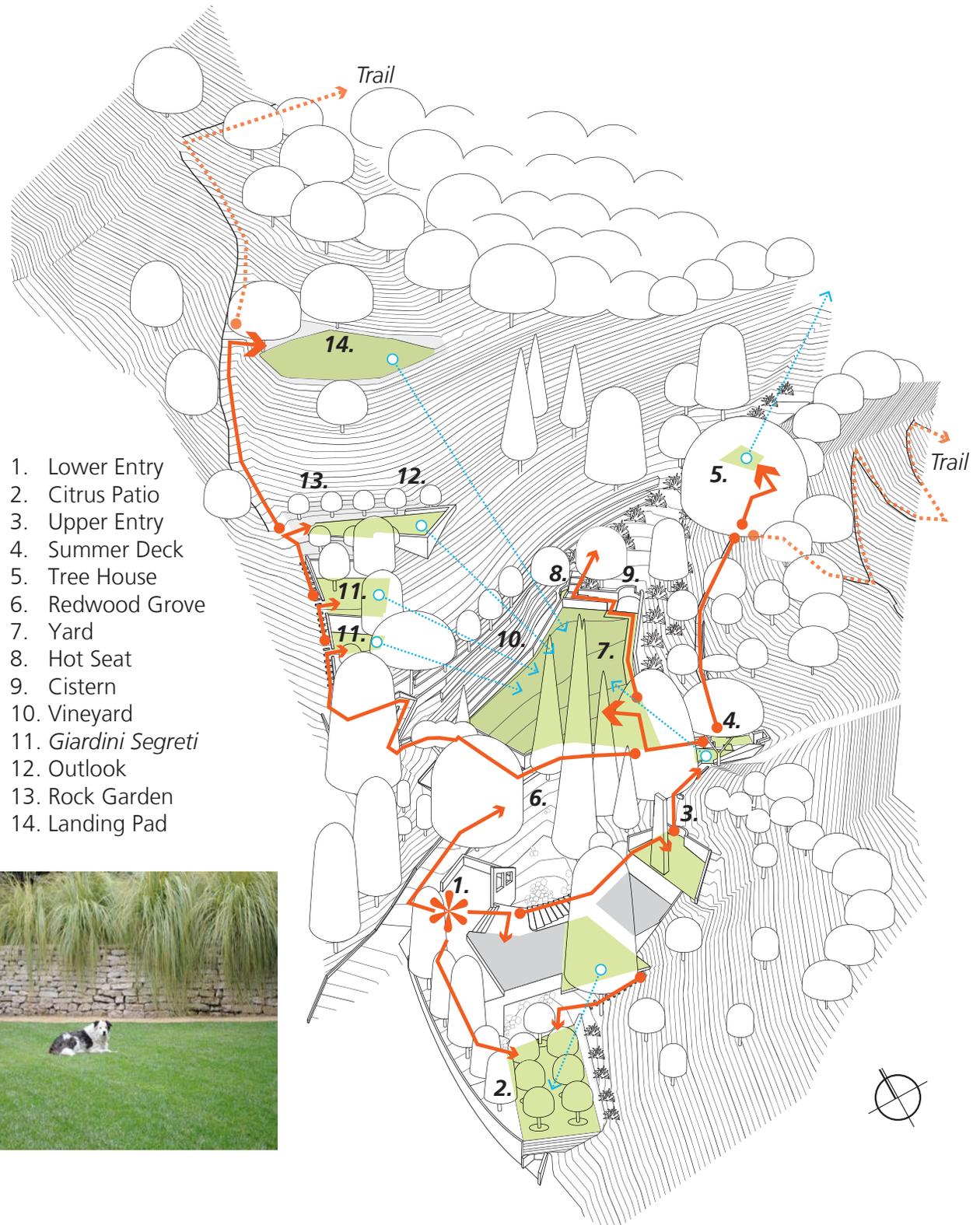


The Garden

As carefully as we planned it, it now seems as if Arroyo House has been the teacher all along. Remodeled more times than we care to remember, successive improvements have gradually directed our view of surrounding terrain toward a rough-hewn Edenic ideal that was not a part of our original thinking. Once seen mostly as a *destination* at the end of a canyon lane, the house now functions more as a beginning – a *portal* to expanded holdings of Mayo's little lots and crazy streets. Simple grading devices and runoff controls, along with the City's permission to use the right-of-way of a street that probably will never be built, have allowed construction of a sequence of distinct outdoor spaces from most of which the house (or any other building) cannot be seen. In the manner of a Renaissance pleasure garden each of these areas is designed to support specific activity and seasonal use. As it turns out, the spaces also have evolved, often accidentally, to trigger awareness of the garden's composition and changing character at different times of day and year.

The garden at Arroyo House covers approximately two acres. The difference in elevation between its highest and lowest points is 117 feet. Most of the garden is located north of the house and uphill from its main floor level. The one exception is the south-facing citrus patio onto which one can look from the house. A perimeter fence helps reduce the ever-present fire hazard and discourage deer, coyotes, bobcats and the occasional mountain lion from entering. But, because of a code limit on its height, it helps to have a large Border Collie on patrol to make the fence work.

The Western Garden Book published by Sunset Magazine places Arroyo House in its Zone 23: *Thermal Belts of Southern California's Coastal Region*: "one of the most favored gardening climates in North America for the growing of subtropical plants". Growing season; almost year-round (all but the first half of January). Rain comes in winter. Reliable ocean influence keeps summers mild except when hot Santa Ana winds come from inland), frosts negligible; 23 degrees F is the record low.

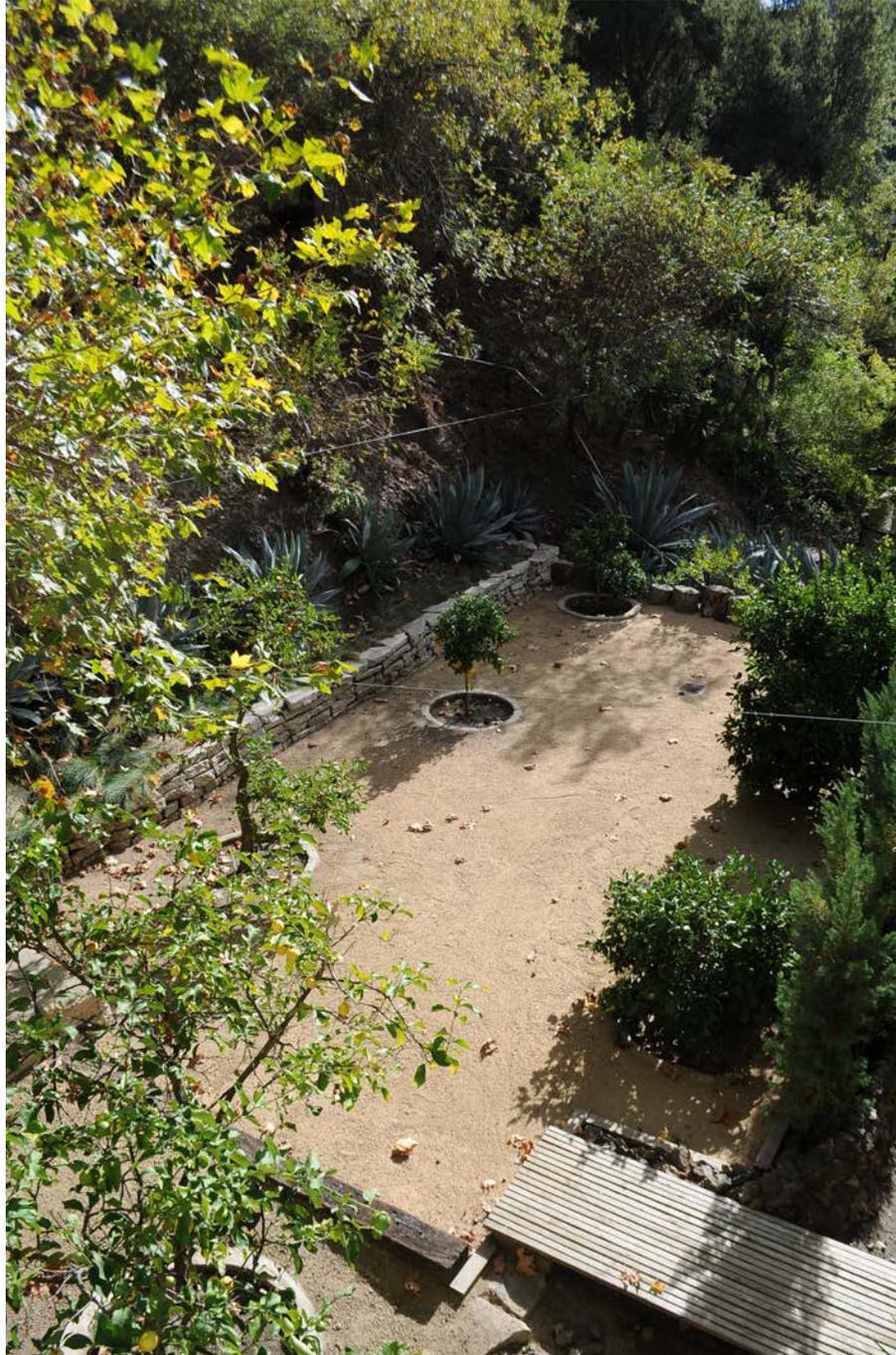




Citrus Patio

Downhill from the house, grading has raised the level of the streambed by eight feet to produce a level, sunny court. A variety of citrus cultivars is planted in circular wells laid out on a grid similar to the plan of *Patio de los Naranjas* to be seen at the cathedrals (former mosques) of both Seville and Cordoba. In order to minimize evaporative water loss, the open irrigation runnels used in those early Islamic designs are replaced here by pipes running below the decomposed granite surface. Irrigation is gravity-fed gray water from a below-grade cistern located under the house. Agaves stabilize the cut talus and, it is hoped, this Californio farming technique of two hundred years ago will actually work to fence out marauding deer.

The patio is reached by timber steps that descend from the car court in front of the house. A low, Japanese-styled wooden bridge spans the rock-lined channel that conveys winter run-off to the canyon storm water system in the street below. Some winters the bridge is actually needed.





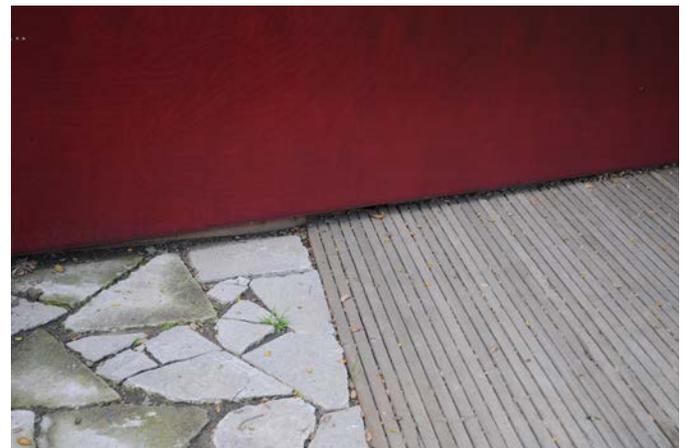
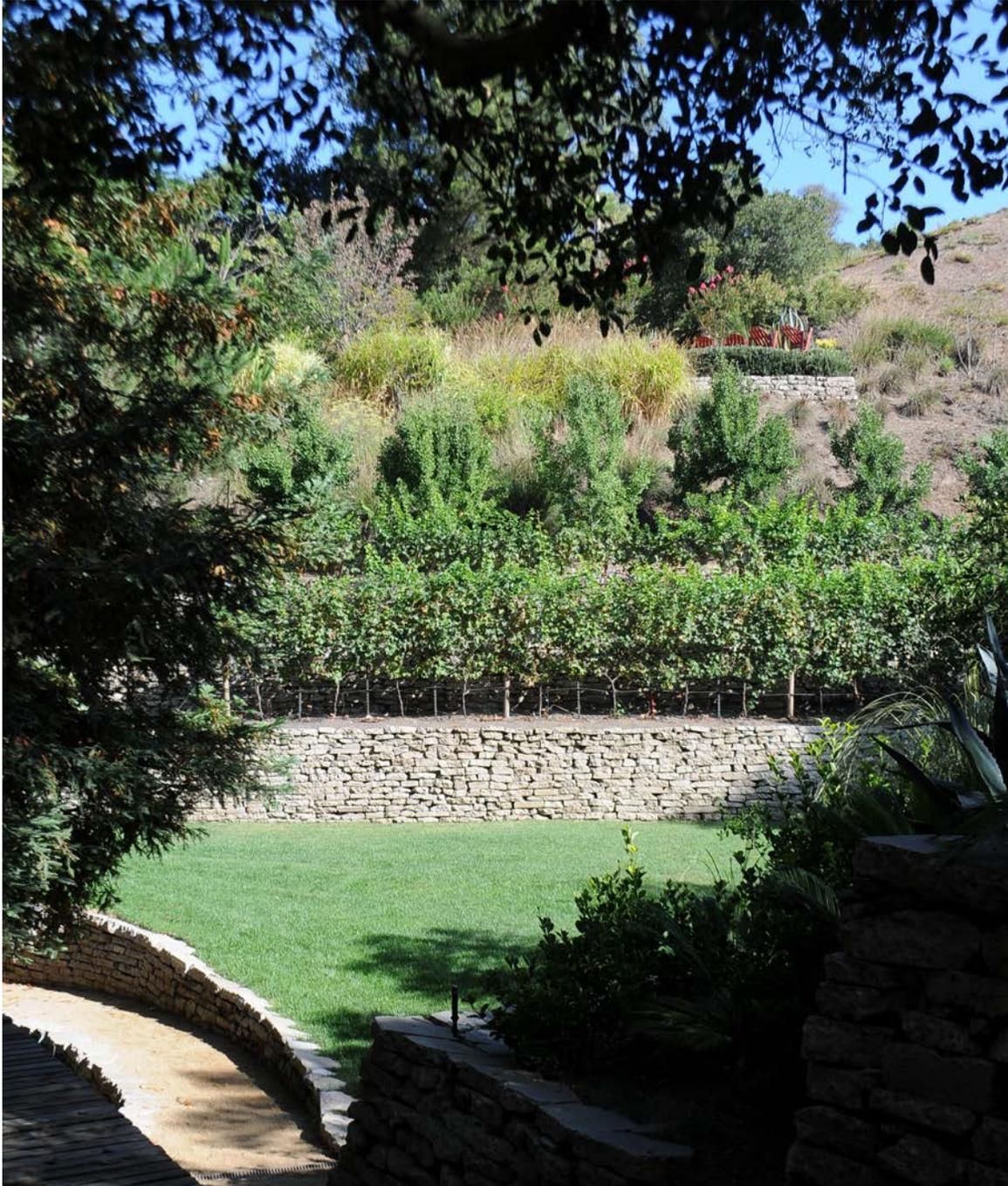
Upper Garden Entrance

Of the two routes into the main garden, entering from above through the stone-paved fireplace court and descending into the yard is the more dramatic. In April, an enfolding Wisteria vine steals the show in the court. Out the wooden gate, a terraced path disappears around the uphill bank which is densely planted with Fortnight Lilies and Kalanchoe. Come autumn, an orange-leaved Japanese Maple brightens the hillside. Acanthus and Giant Rye grass stabilize the slope below.

The eye is drawn into the garden beyond by an old, shapely oak that survived the 1961 Bel Air fire – the last burn to occur in these woods. Set back under its canopy, a redwood seating platform hovers above a swale made from rocks pulled from the hillside. It guides a winter runoff from a *barranca* down to the streambed to prevent erosion. Framed sightlines aimed down into the yard and up toward the outlook perched across the arroyo look over terraces planted with Agaves, Cycads, and Euonymus.









Tree House

Just beyond the deck, a path cut into the hillside ramps up steeply to the oldest live oak on the property. Its thick, nearly horizontal lower limbs, aided by an impressive array of framing hardware: joist hangers, hold-downs, post bases, bolts, lag screws, straps, clevises and threaded rods, support three triangular wood floors. These are framed on overly long wood beams under which the tree slide as it grows outward.

A succession of ship's ladders gets you to the top deck. Up there, an opening in the leaf canopy on the uphill provides a surprising, close-up view of chaparral and the ridge above the arroyo. Nautical elements set the theme and the structure is most meaningfully experienced in a high wind when it creaks like a wooden ship.

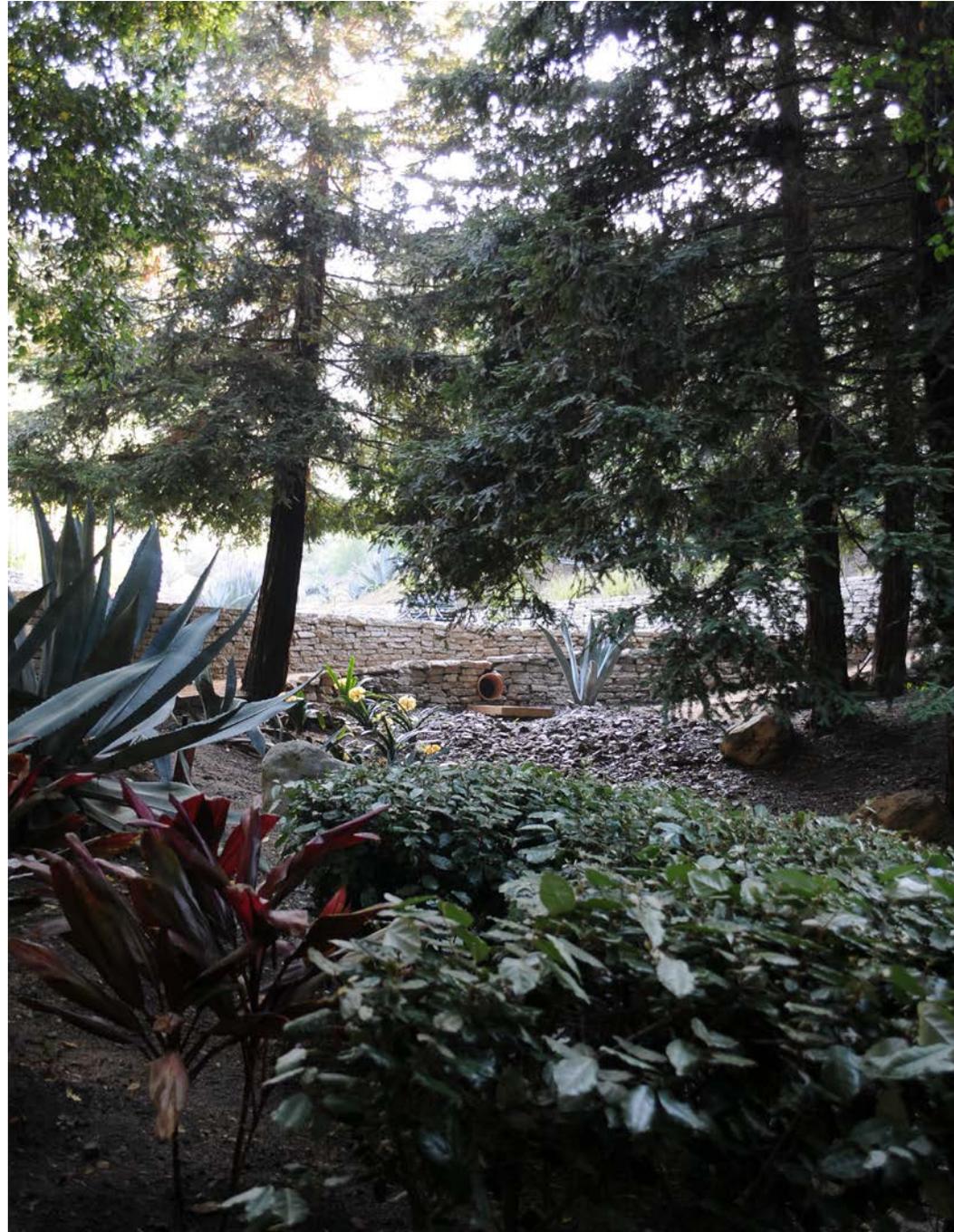
Seen from below during the day, the tree house is indistinguishable in the foliage. But by night, its interior lighting and fiery coloring, set against a black background, gleam through the branches like a torch.





Lower Garden Entrance

The lower entry sequence begins directly off the car court where a broad pathway, surfaced with buff-colored decomposed granite, arcs into the garden. A grove of redwoods rises from the boulder-strewn streambed to create deep shade over natural-looking terrain reminiscent of a woodland creek on the northern California coast. It becomes even more convincing after a week of hard rain when run-off from forty acres of hillsides tumbles noisily down the watercourse. Comparison with the same view shortly after the house was built (below) illustrates the transformation produced by grading and the redwoods as they have matured. Trees of this type, endemic to zones closer to the coast than this, can reach three hundred feet in height.





Yard

A ramp lifts the path over the outfall of a culvert that conducts rainwater from a circular catch basin located at the far end of the raised lawn. Cut off from the house by the mass of closely planted redwoods, the yard is framed on three sides by revetments of recycled broken concrete laid up without mortar in a technique similar to that used in constructing agricultural terraces by the Incas in Peru. Trapezoidal in plan, this space strongly imparts a sense of enclosure and heightens awareness of the crater-like basin created by surrounding hillside. It works equally well as an auditorium, a party space, or with minor modifications to the six wicket game, a croquet court. At its rear, low steps rise to a concrete version of the "hot seat" used in ancient Roman gardens. Its south-facing solar mass absorbs the heat of sunlight during the day to provide evening warming. At the end of the property, a gate on the centerline of a "paper street" opens to the uncleared arroyo.



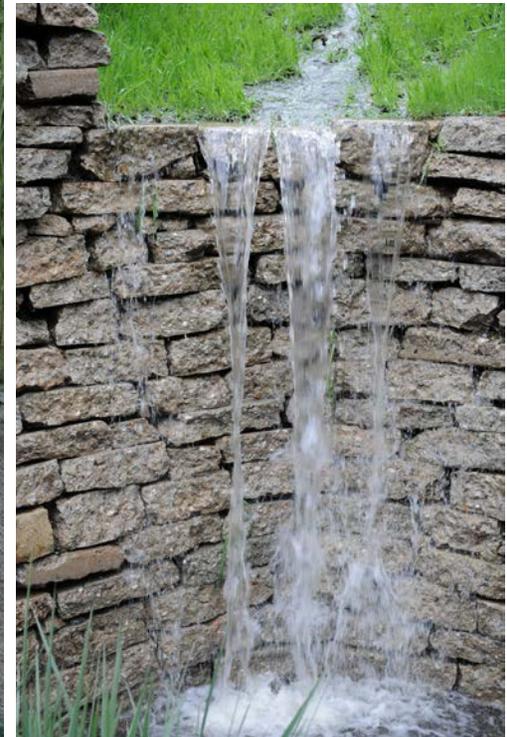






South Bank

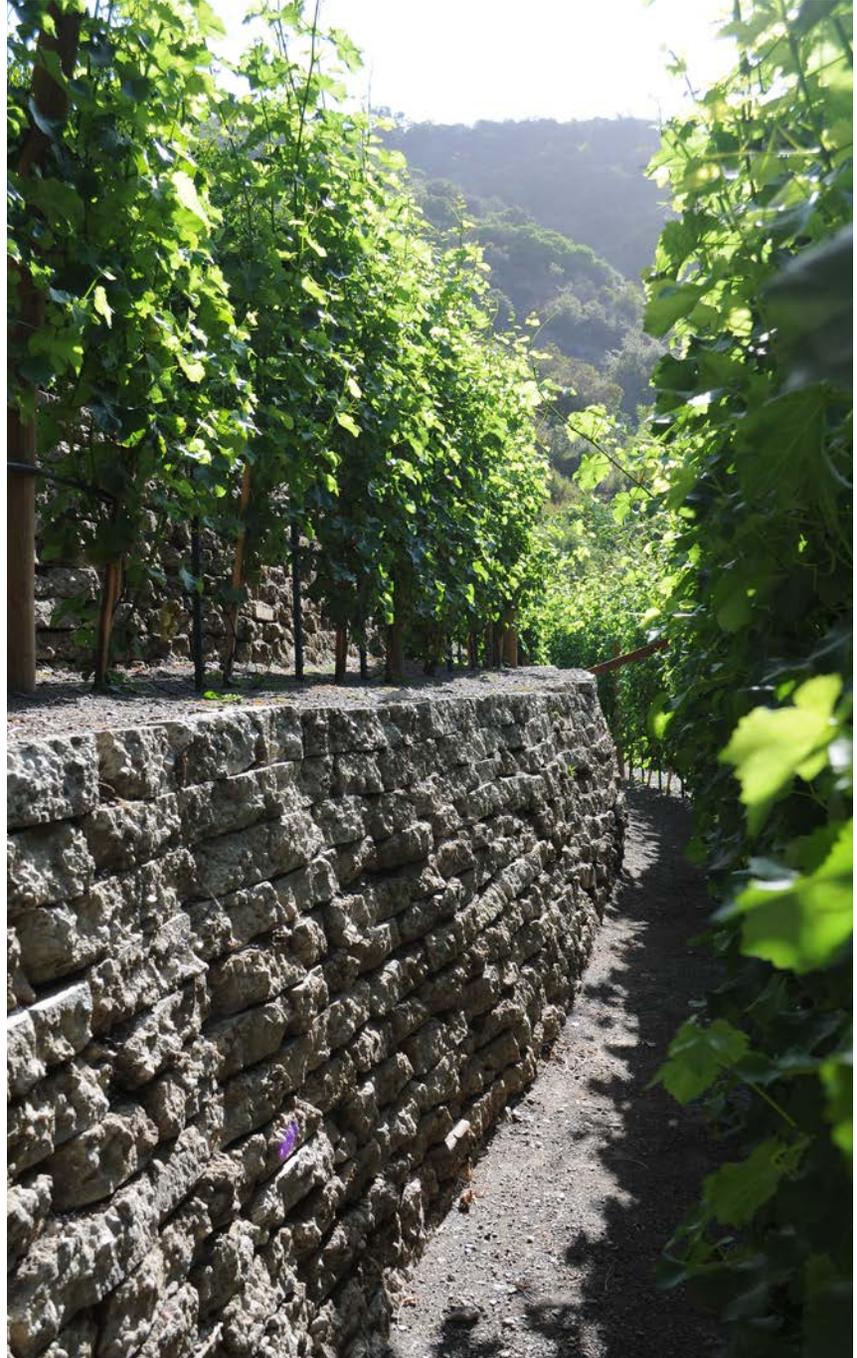
On the south side of the yard slender, knife-sharp leaves of Pampas Grass fall over the revetment to form a linear, softly curving edge that undulates in the breeze. The path beneath leads to the catch basin where, after a week of heavy rain, a waterfall does the same thing. At night uplights sunken in the pathway reflect off the broken concrete and exaggerate its rough texture. Further up, a line of blue agaves paralleling the Pampas Grass reinforces the eastward perspective up the arroyo but, in accordance with the general policy of attempting to merge with the chaparral, a native Sugar Sumac tree is allowed to interrupt the progression. The hillside is planted with Jacarandas, Hollywood Cedars, Plums, and Apricots. Looking back toward the house from this point one gets the best view of the seventy-foot height that five-gallon Coast Redwoods can attain in fewer than thirty years.





Vineyard

The south facing bank is terraced to support a small working vineyard. Single, *cordon élevée* trellises support mid-level, spur-pruned vines of *cabernet franc* and *sauvignon blanc* grapes from which wine is made onsite. Ideally producing over one thousand pounds of grapes, the vineyard should eventually yield around twenty-five cases of wine. Above the vineyard a terrace of Ginkgos stabilizes the hillside and adds dazzling gold autumn color.





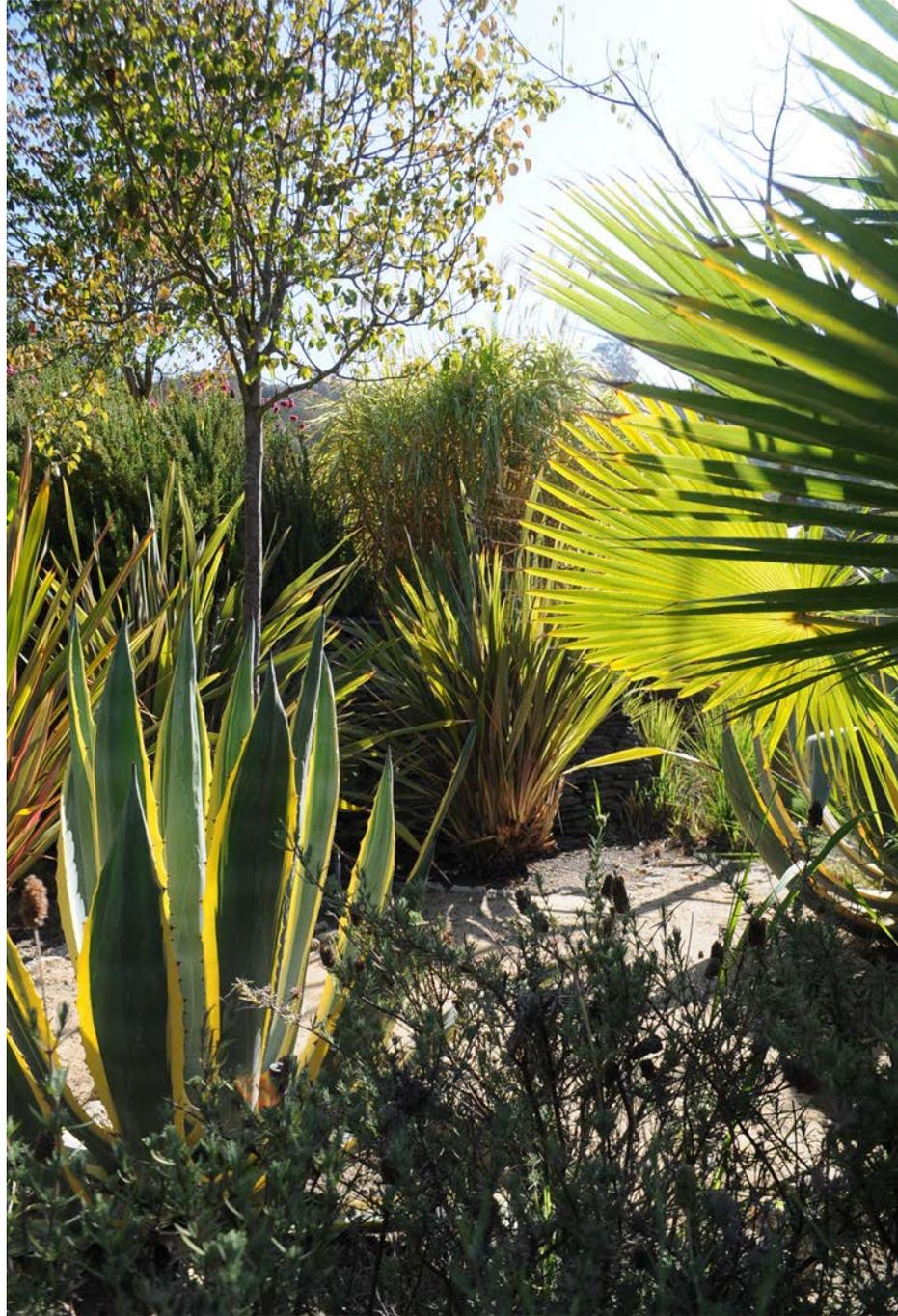
Upper Garden

Timber steps at the western corner of the yard zigzag up past the vineyard and a shady bank planted with Artemisia, Matilija Poppies, Artichokes, and Rhubarb. It then straightens into a stepped, Rosemary-lined path that climbs the ridge. Before arriving at an outlook, the path passes two terraces edged in tall grasses that frame sneaky views down onto yard activities and out across the arroyo in the manner of Italian *giardini segreti*. Big scaled, specimen plants include variegated Agave, Phormium, and Mexican Fan Palm. Now that this area is irrigated, volunteering native trees include Live Oaks and Sumacs. Planted trees include Crape Myrtle, Gold Medallion, Floss Silk, Balsam Fir, and Bradford Pears that, by November, will have turned a deep red.

Building a garden from scratch requires local horticultural know-how. In its absence almost everything up here has been moved at least once since first planting.



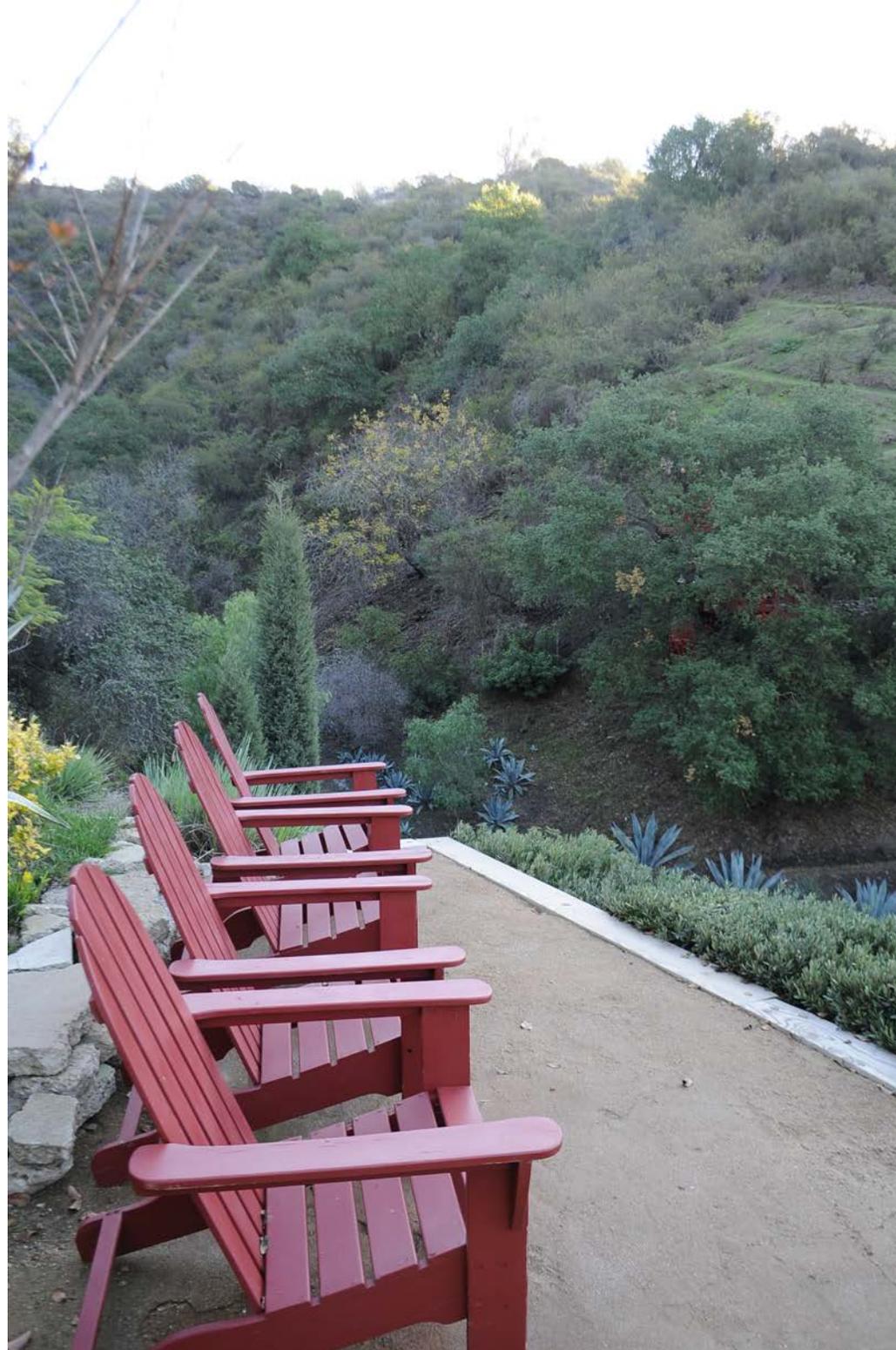






Outlook

Pushed to the edge of the arroyo for views down into gardens below and the canyon beyond, the outlook visually pulls the whole garden together, links it to the larger landscape, and becomes a culmination. It's reached through an allée of Crape Myrtles and fronted by a hedge of dwarf Olive trees. It's a hard-surfaced terrace paved with decomposed granite mixed with cement to allow a crisp ordering of chairs that makes this the most formalized place in the garden. Pre-existing Ceanothus and planted clumping grasses and Jacarandas stabilize the slope below. Oriented almost due south, the outlook is drenched in sunlight and, thirty-five feet above the yard, there's almost always a breeze up here. But until the surrounding trees form a canopy, it's most likely to be used in cooler times of year or at night when it becomes a moon-viewing platform looking out over mountain darkness.





Rock Garden and Landing Pad

An exposed shale ledge next to the outlook backs up a rock garden planted with Agaves, Aloes, Cactus, Euphorbia (“Sticks of Fire” and “Hercules’ Club”) and a formidable Dasylirion. In early winter, bright yellows, pinks, and oranges enliven the blue-green field.

Still higher on the property, a curiously unbuilt, level pad reached by an abandoned asphalt driveway presents a fine place for canyon contemplation. Local lore tells of its grading long ago by real estate agents who used it to show prospective buyers lots across the canyon that were visible only from here. At night, viewed from this dark side of the canyon, lights twinkle warmly from the windows of houses ghostly realtors may have sired along a sloping dead-end street. Photo-voltaic lamps outline the edge of the pad, inviting thoughts of night landings by extraterrestrial visitors. Beyond this tended landscape, a network of hiking trails, now used mostly by deer, winds over terrain that’s never been cleared except by wildfire.







Arroyo House Plant List

Trees

Abies balsamea
Acer palmatum
Arbutus unedo
Cassia leptophylla
Ceanothus leucodermis, arboreus, etc.
Cercocarpus betuloides

Chorisia speciosa
Citrus × latifolia "Bearss"
Citrus × limon "Meyer", "Lisbon"
Citrus × paradisi "Ruby Red"
Citrus × sinensis "Blood", "Valencia"
Cupressus guadalupensis
Ficus carica "Mission"
Ginkgo biloba var. "Autumn Gold"
Heteromeles arbutifolia
Jacaranda mimosifolia
Juglans californica
Juniperus chinensis "Torulosa"
Lagerstroemia indica
Liquidambar formosana
Olea Europaea "Mantra"
Persea Americana "Haas"
Pinus canariensis
Pinus pinea
Pinus halepensis
Pittosporum undulatum
Platanus racemosa
Podocarpus gracilior
Prunus domestica
Pyrus calleryana
Quercus agrifolia
Rhus ovata
Ricinus communis
Sambucus Mexicana
Schinus molle
Sequoia sempervirens
Washingtonia robusta

37 total *denotes endemic species (8)

Shrubs, Plants, and Grasses

Acanthus mollis
Adenostoma fasciculatum
Agropyron magellanicum
Agapanthus orientalis
Agave Americana
Agave Americana var. *variegata*
Aloe arborescens
Azalea belgian indica
Artemisia "Powis Castle"
Camellia japonica
Canna generalis "Tropicanna"
Clivia miniata
Cordylina australis var. *atropurpurea*
Cordylina terminalis
Cortaderilla Selloana var. *aureolineata*

Crassula argentea
Cycas revoluta
Cynara cardunculus var. *scolymus*
Dasyllirion longissimum
Dietes bicolor
Dietes iridioides var. *Johnsonii*
Echium fastosom
Elaeagnus pungens
Elymus condensatus
Euonymus fortunei
Euphorbia canariensis

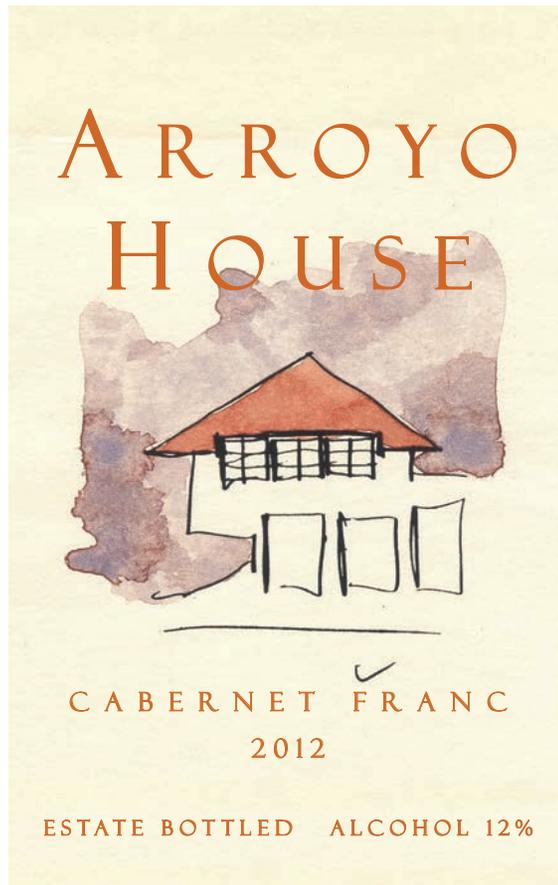
Euphorbia tirucalli
Fatshedera lizei
Fatsia japonica
Festuca arundinacea
Ficus elastica
Foeniculum vulgare
Hedera helix
Hibiscus rosa-sinensis
Hydrangea macrophylla
Kalanchoe blossfeldiana

Bear's Breech
 Chamise, Greasewood
 Blue Wheat Grass
 Lilly of the Nile
 Century Plant
 Century Plant
 Aloe
 Azalea
 Bougainvillea
 Camellia
 Tropicanna Lily
 Kaffir Lily
 Bronze Dracaena
 Ti
 Pampas Grass
 "Gold Band"
 Jade Plant
 Sago Palm
 Artichoke
 Dasyllirion
 Fortnight Lily
 Fortnight Lily
 Pride of Madeira
 Silverberry
 Giant Wild Rye
 Euonymus
 Canary Island Spurge,
 Hercules Club
 Sticks on Fire
 Fatshedera
 Japanese Aralia
 Tall Fescue grass
 Rubber Plant
 Common Fennel
 English Ivy
 Hibiscus
 Hydrangea
 Kalanchoe

Kalanchoe fedtschenkoii
Lantana montevidensis
Lavandra stoechas
Liriope spicata
Miscanthus sacchariflorus var. *robustus*
Myrtus communis var. *buxifolia*
Pennisetum setaceum
Photinia fraseri
Pyracantha coccinea var. *government red*
Romneya coulteri
Rosmarinus officinalis *prostratus*
Rosmarinus officinalis "Tuscan Blue"
Rheum rhabarbarum
Rhus (Malosma) laurina
Salvia azurea grandiflora
Stipa tenuissima
Strelitzia reginae
Syringa vulgaris
Tecomaria capensis
Toxicodendron diversilobum
Vitis vinifera
Wisteria sinensis

Total: 59 *denotes endemic species (2)

South American Air Plant
 Lantana
 Spanish Lavender
 Lily Turf
 Giant Silver Banner Grass
 Boxleaf Myrtle
 Red Fountain Grass
 Photinia
 Firethorn
 Matilija Poppy
 Dwarf Rosemary
 Rosemary
 Rhubarb
 Laurel Sumac*
 Purple Sage
 Mexican Feather Grass
 Bird of Paradise
 Common Lilac
 Cape Honeysuckle
 Poison Oak*
 Wine Grape
 Chinese Wisteria



Design Awards

Honor Award, Los Angeles/AIA, 1985

Honor Award, California Council/AIA, 1986

AIA/ Sunset Western Home Award, 1987-1988

Publication

Architectural Digest, September, 2004

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The Architectural Review, London, December, 1987

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Los Angeles Times, June 14, 1987

UCLA Architecture and Planning, Summer, 1986

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